

# **The Meat Eaters' Right to Know Act**

## **§ 1. Congressional statement of findings**

(a) The Congress finds that the abuse of livestock animals on farms and in slaughterhouses violates the public interest in the humane treatment and slaughter of animals raised for meat and poultry. Recent undercover videos taken on farms and in slaughterhouses by animal protection organizations have revealed the egregious mistreatment of animals raised to produce these products.

(b) The Congress further finds that information about the treatment of these animals is of vital importance to the American consumer. Consumers are curious about where their food comes from and favor laws and policies that create transparency in the food industry.

(c) It is in the essential public interest that consumers of animal products possess the greatest possible information about the treatment of animals in slaughterhouses. Video surveillance providing continuous footage of activities in these facilities promotes this goal.

## **§ 2. Definitions**

(a) Slaughter plant—Slaughter plant refers to any facility engaged in the slaughter of animals for meat and poultry products, which is operating under a grant of inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or a custom exemption to such inspection.

(b) Video recording—Video recording refers to live footage produced by high-definition video cameras stationed at fixed locations throughout a slaughter plant, and to any recording capturing live images inside the slaughter plant.

(c) Video streaming—Video streaming refers to a continuously running live feed, streamed on the Internet, of a video recording taken inside the slaughter plant.

(d) Company website—Company website refers to any Internet web page owned or operated by, or on behalf of, a slaughter plant or its parent company.

## **§ 3. Video Recording Required**

Slaughter plants must produce video recordings capturing every location of the slaughter plant at which live animals or carcasses are handled or slaughtered, including all truck unloading

areas, pens, and chutes, as well as the stun box, shackle area, kill line, and processing areas.

#### **§ 4. Live Video Streaming Required**

(a) Slaughter plants must provide on their company website or websites live video streaming of all video recordings produced pursuant to Section 3.

(b) Such video streaming must be freely accessible and continuously available to any visitor to the company website.

(c) Slaughter plants that do not maintain a company website must make their video recordings available to the United States Department of Agriculture, which shall make such recordings available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

#### **§ 5. Penalties**

(a) Failure of a slaughter plant to produce and provide video recording as described in Section 3 shall result in a fine of not less than \$1,000 per day for each day or portion thereof that video recording is not produced.

(b) Failure of a meat company to provide video streaming as described in Section 4 shall result in a fine of not less than \$1,000 per day for each day or portion thereof that video streaming is not provided on a company website or supplied to the USDA under Section 4(c).

#### **§ 6. Effective Date**

In order to give slaughter plants sufficient time to set up the technology necessary to comply with the law, the effective date of this statute is March 2, 2015.

INTRODUCING THE MEAT EATERS' RIGHT TO KNOW ACT

---

HON. PANOP T. KAHN  
of California  
in the House of Representatives  
Wednesday, January 25, 2012

Mr. KAHN. Madam Speaker, I've introduced the Meat Eaters' Right to Know Act to address the abuse of animals in our nation's slaughterhouses, something I have been trying to address for the past several Congresses.

Thirty-five years ago, Congress enacted legislation, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, to require the humane treatment of animals in our slaughterhouses. The Act provides that animals must be rendered unconscious and insensible to pain before they are slaughtered.

But Congress didn't finish the job. We overtasked our food safety inspectors with the job of humane handling enforcement, and provided only weak penalties that have proven ineffective. Warning notices and one-day suspensions simply don't provide a meaningful deterrent to animal abuse. Slaughterhouses consider the Humane Slaughter law penalties merely the "cost of doing business." They have little incentive to train workers to treat animals humanely, because until recently, consumers were completely in the dark.

In recent years, we've seen an avalanche of concern and interest in the way animals are treated on farms and in slaughterhouses. I receive thousands of calls, emails, and letters every year from constituents outraged by the horrendous cruelty they see in undercover videos, and desperate for more information about meat production. Right now, they have no way of knowing—on labels, from the USDA, or on company websites—which slaughterhouses play by the rules, and which abuse animals.

We've also heard from USDA that they need stronger tools to prevent animal abuse in slaughterhouses. Inspectors don't have eyes on the backs of their heads, and can't check for ineffective stunning or overdriving of animals while they're also looking out for *Salmonella*. They need video surveillance to assist in their Humane Slaughter oversight and provide a view into all areas of the slaughter plant. Video surveillance

could have prevented an episode like Hallmark-Westland, and could very likely prevent the next meat recall.

It is time Congress finishes the job and provides an extra set of eyes, so to speak, to prevent animal abuse in slaughterhouses and to help American consumers make educated choices about their food.

This legislation answers that need, by requiring video surveillance inside slaughterhouses, which both USDA and consumers can use to provide a check on inhumane treatment.

I ask my colleagues to support this legislation so we can end the deplorable abuse of animals in our Nation's slaughterhouses and give consumers the information they need to vote with their wallets.

[House Report 112-666]

[From the U.S. Government Printing Office]

112th Congress  
Report

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2d Session  
112-666

=====

MEAT EATERS' RIGHT TO KNOW ACT OF 2012

—————

Mr. Oliver, from the Committee on Agriculture, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 108]

The Committee on Agriculture, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 108) to require slaughterhouses to install video cameras and make the footage available to the public, having considered the same, report favorably thereon and recommend that the bill do pass.

**BACKGROUND AND NEEDS**

The Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) originally passed in 1958 and adopted in its modern form in 1978, requires the humane treatment of livestock slaughtered in USDA inspected slaughter plants. It is enforced by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and incorporated into the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA).

According to a 2009 USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audit, FSIS Inspectors are often absent or engaged in food safety inspection duties, and thus fail to notice or prevent the abuse of animals in slaughterhouses. This lack of adequate staff and resources has resulted in under-enforcement of the HMSA,

which has allowed egregious mistreatment of livestock to occasionally go unnoticed. USDA oversight has failed to prevent horrific cruelty in slaughterhouses in numerous cases, as evidenced by undercover video taken by animal activists. Such videos have revealed abuse of downed cows at Hallmark-Westland Meat Packing in California in 2008 and the torture of veal calves at the Bushway Packing plant in Vermont in 2010, among other instances.

Consumers have reacted to these videos with concern and great interest, as they provide a window into the treatment of animals raised for food and the manner in which meat is produced. This information is of vital importance to consumers, who have expressed an increasing curiosity in recent years about how the food they eat is produced.

Making more information about meat production available to consumers is necessary to educate consumers and to ensure the humane treatment of livestock animals. Inspectors frequently report that video surveillance would facilitate more robust enforcement of the HMSA and provide a truer picture of animal treatment.

A 2010 Consumer Reports survey revealed that animal welfare is a top concern for consumers, and also the subject about which labels fail to convey any meaningful information. Consumers overwhelmingly agree with the statement that animals in slaughterhouses should be treated humanely. Yet no label or company website gives consumers what they say they want, in survey after survey: the complete picture about what happens on farms and in slaughterhouses.

H.R. 108, through mandatory video surveillance providing continuous footage of ongoing activities in the slaughterhouse, would answer consumers' calls for more information about the origins of meat, while providing a stronger incentive for slaughter plants to treat animals with care.

#### **SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS**

H.R. 108 would require that slaughter plants produce video recordings capturing continuous footage of every location of the slaughter plant in which live animals or carcasses are handled or slaughtered.

H.R. 108 would further require slaughter plants to stream this video on their company website and make such video streaming

freely accessible to any visitor to the website. The bill would require plants that do not maintain websites to turn over their video to the USDA, which would make the video available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act.

H.R. 108 would create civil penalties for failure to produce or stream videos as detailed in the act.

H.R. 108 provides slaughterhouses with three years to implement its requirements.